

"Temptation" Genesis 8:8-17; I Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15; Psalm 25:1-10 3-05-06

The season of Lent always begins with a consideration of the temptation of Christ, in the desert or wilderness following his baptism. This period of temptation lasted for forty days and nights, the length of Lent. Sundays are never counted in the forty days and nights because Sundays are always feast days.

We are told this was a time of testing for Jesus, a time during which he resisted setting aside the mission that was before him for food, fame and power. Some believe he was visited by a physical manifestation of the devil, which tried to coax him away from his calling. Others think his struggle was one that was internal as he fought to understand just what it was that was required of him as God's beloved Son. No matter which way makes the most sense to us, this had to be a time of soul-searching and a time of decision. As we know, he emerged from his days of exile determined to do God's will, as he understood it. He decided to make a covenant with his Father in heaven. Evil did not triumph.

Each of the synoptic gospels portrays this event in different ways. The gospel of Mark has very little detail. Matthew and Luke have far more and mention what the three temptations are. They highlight the strength Jesus had to overcome them.

We often mark the season of Lent in lesser ways. We use it as a time to overcome temptation by giving up things like dessert or alcohol, or cigarettes or caramel, or even chocolate, although the health benefits of chocolate are a very popular topic in our day and age. It is no longer being viewed as a treat but as a form of medicinal treatment. So, I am sure we would not want to give it up for Lent, especially the dark variety.

I am always surprised at the many ways we humans are tempted as we go through life. It is a daily struggle to keep the covenant we have with God to seek and know and follow our Creator's ways. I am also amazed by the way we give in to the temptations before us. Most often it seems that we stray from the right way of thinking by doing things that are bad for us and that do not enhance us one bit. We sometimes are caught in traps of our own making when we act in ways that are not for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. We lose our focus and the desire God has for our lives when we entertain our own desires to the exclusion of all others.

But what of those temptations we have that are to do something good and decent and fair? Those small and big things that will help make life better for others as well as our selves? Those actions that enhance all of life in the corner of the world in which we live and move and have our being? The temptation to do good is resisted just as much as the temptation to do something bad is. Isn't it? We often resist doing something good for someone else because we just don't have the time or don't want to get involved. For many of us, this may cause twinges of conscience until we justify why it is we do not go into action.

Instead of pondering our own resistance to good or bad temptation, it seems we far prefer to wonder about the nature of people, those poor dear souls, who choose to walk from the pathways of goodness and decency to follow some other god, usually a god of their own making. When we find ourselves judging others for what we consider their sins of omission and commission, we must always remember that we all are human and, as Ben Franklin, one of my favorite people from history, penned, "To err is human, to repent divine and to persist devilish." If anyone moves from the pathways, which are considered true and fair and beautiful, that person has the need to

back up, and repent of his or her actions. Sometimes, it seems the devil makes them, and us, do otherwise.

As we move through the days and nights of Lent, we need to ponder the temptations we face in our lives. We need to decide which are the ones that are destructive and which are the ones that can be positive. Then we need to choose, as did our Christ, which way we will follow. The choice is always ours, let us all choose wisely.

In my former life, I used to attend a group that was concerned with spiritual growth and learning to choose direction in life with a measure of wisdom. It was a very diverse group. But, even with our diversity of faith systems, we always closed each meeting with something known as “The Great Invocation.” Some of us may know of this, it is a little prayer that is said all around the world in many different languages on a daily basis. Others in other places are reciting this as I speak. It seems to sum up the goal of our season of Lent and what should be the goal of our lifetimes—the goal toward which we all should direct our minds and hearts. The words of the “Invocation” are:

The Great Invocation

From the point of Light within the Mind of God

Let light stream forth into the minds of men.

Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God

Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.

May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known

Let purpose guide the little wills of men –

The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men

Let the Plan of Love and Light work out

And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth Amen